

Alumni Newsletter

The gw Hatchet

An Independent Student Newspaper

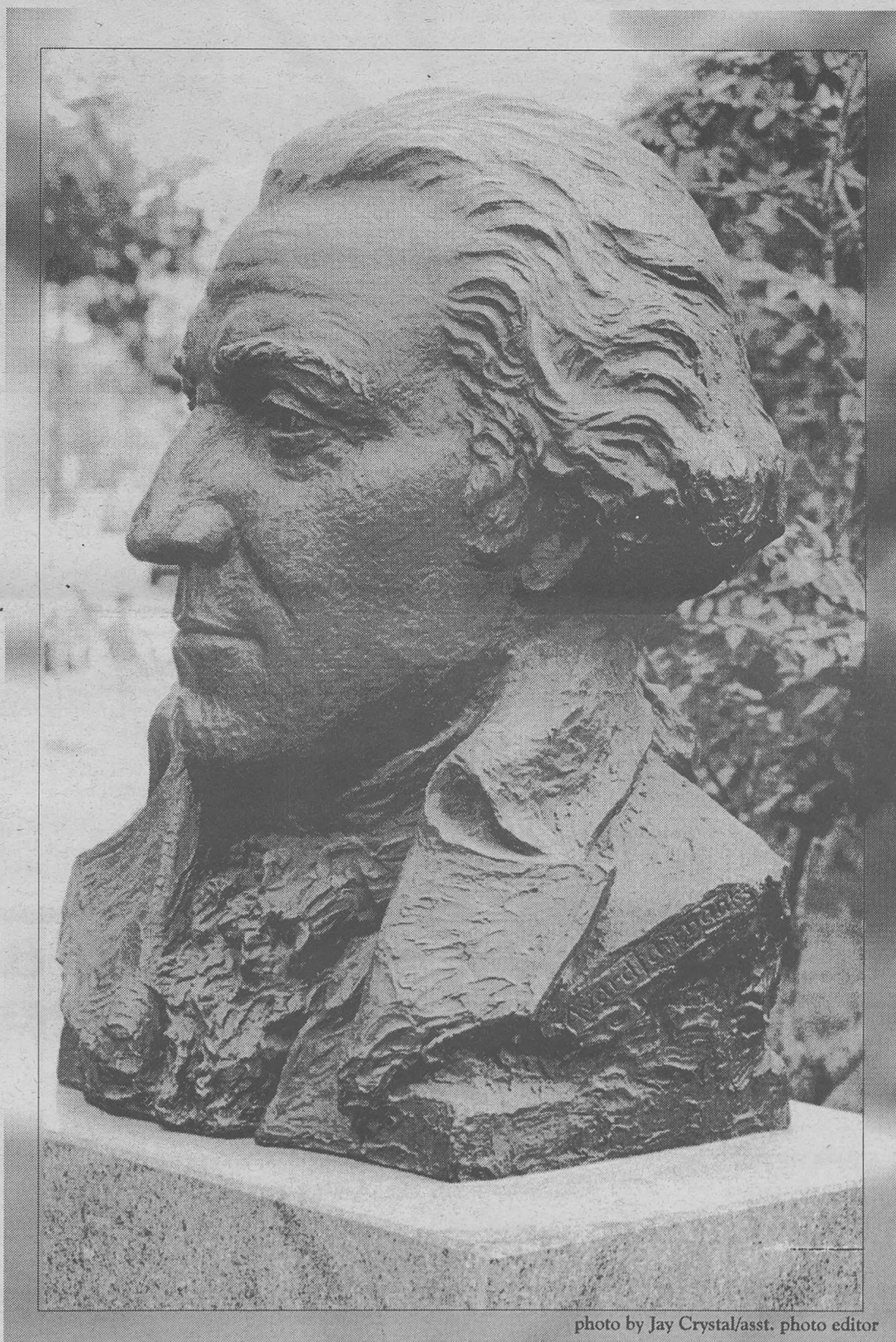


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Vol. 94, No. 6

Serving The George Washington University Community Since 1904

Monday, August 18, 1997

Well on the way

The GW Hatchet raises \$34,000 in six months of the scholarship campaign.

News, p. 6



Remembering Puff

Students and friends share memories.

Appreciation, p. 5



TJ's tough transition

Former GW star Abraham adjusts to life in the WNBA.

Sports, p. 7

Beloved professor loses fight with cancer

'Puff' remembered as friend and mentor

by Shruti Date

Hatchet Staff Writer

GW journalism professor Charles W. Puffenbarger, known to colleagues and friends as "Puff," died June 28 of cancer.

A mentor, not just a teacher, a friend, not just an editor, Puff took himself, his work and his interactions with others to a higher level.

"It is what you put into (life)," he told a classroom of young journalists in March.

The conviction to add to life served Puff well in his five-decade career as journalist, and in his capacity as a teacher and academic adviser.

Puff's ability to notice and point out talent in students became one of his signature traits as a professor at GW.

"He saw things in the young that other people didn't," said Elissa Leibowitz, a former student and former editor in chief of The GW Hatchet.

"He never said that a student is hopeless," said Maria George, a secretary in the School of Media and Public Affairs. "He always saw some talent."

"I thought he was one of the most caring, dedicated and loyal professors," former Hatchet Editor in Chief Jared Sher added.

"He was the type of person that took the time to ask you how your life was going," Michelle Battleline, a former student, said. "I felt honored just to have known him."

"A lot of professors could learn a lot about his relationships with his students," Leibowitz said. "He was the one who put his neck out for students."

When he came aboard the staff of The Washington Post in 1969, Puff was told, "We don't know what we want to do with you yet, but we just want to hire you."

But despite his initial ambiguity, Puff made his mark at the paper.

As the business editor at The Post until 1985, Puffenbarger built the section to its present status. Starting with a staff of seven, he left the newspaper with a solid business section of 42 reporters.

Puff headed a Post staff of about 40 reporters during the anti-Vietnam war protests and the Kennedy assassination in the 1960s.

Puffenbarger had as his protégés some of the best known names in journalism. Early in Post reporter Carl Bernstein's career, Puff announced that someday Bernstein would win a Pulitzer Prize, a prediction that came true when

Bernstein and Bob Woodward won the award for their coverage of Watergate.

Though he began his teaching career as a part-time professor, he soon realized that he loved teaching more than working as a journalist.

Puff began applying his "put something into life" attitude to his teaching style. He never tired of endless questions from aspiring journalists. His door was never closed to anyone who wanted to wander in and chat. And he never tired of telling stories about his experiences in life.

Some stories were about his unsuccessful campaign to become president of the student body during his undergraduate years at the University of Maryland, with Jim Henson, the creator of the Muppets, as his campaign manager. Others were about the events he had covered — murders and political events.

"He was very engaging," Sher said. "You always felt like you had gotten something out of the conversation."

Sher also noted that Puffenbarger's guidance was critical to the student journalists on The Hatchet staff. Sher recalls that at meetings of The Hatchet's Board of Directors all eyes would turn to Puff to answer questions.

In May, he earned The Hatchet's Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award.

Sher pointed out that Puffenbarger's teaching provided the perfect combination of real-world experience and normal classroom fare.

Leibowitz said Puff's immense network of connections played an essential role in students like herself finding internships and postgraduate employment.

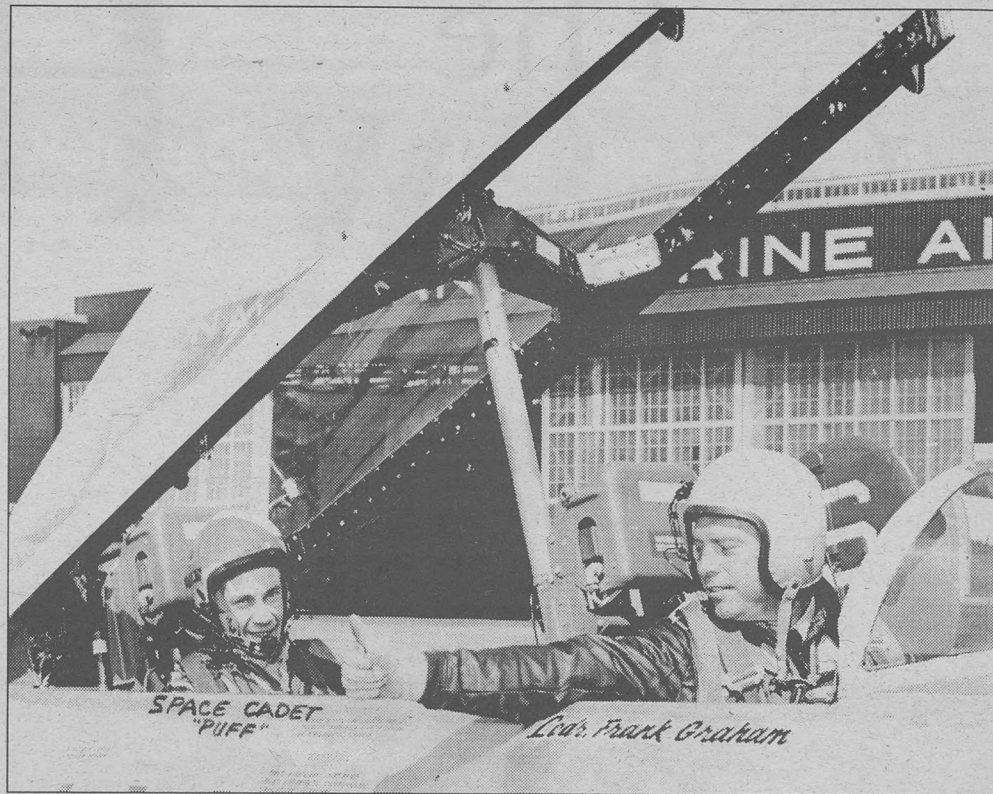
Professor Jean Folkerts, director of the School of Public and Media Affairs, said the fact that Puff knew so many people in journalism added to his effectiveness as an educator.

Though he guided others in their careers, his own career was never steered by a mentor.

"I was always more of a mentor to other people rather than having a mentor for myself," Puff said in March.

Puff had a wide range of jobs in the field of journalism, from heading the business section at The Post, covering the District as city editor at the old Washington Evening Star, writing about everything from jailbreaks to court hearings as a general assignment reporter for the Associated Press and The Virginian-Pilot or writing press releases in the Philippines for the Army during World War II.

"I am one of those people that believes in giving to the organization that you work for



Journalism professor Charles W. Puffenbarger always left his door open to students. Puff died of cancer on June 28. A memorial service is scheduled for Sept. 26.

rather than the taking from it," he said. "I have never had a job that I did not like."

His positive attitude towards his career exemplified his general outlook on life.

"You have to have a curiosity about people," he said. "If you get that too-hard edge you don't get a feeling for the story."

He emphasized that you need to be a "nice" person to be a good journalist.

Leibowitz remembered that, even after she graduated, her former professor kept teaching her, not necessarily about how to be a journalist, but how to treat people she encountered.

George remembers her third day working at SMPA, when she was thinking about quitting after a bad experience with a colleague.

"He told me 'hang in there Maria' ... he was there for me," George said. "He was like a breath of fresh air every time he walked into a room."

George also recalls how he would bring bouquets and bunches of roses and black-eyed

Susans from his personal garden to brighten up the SMPA office.

Puff's positive attitude carried him through personal crisis as well. Despite being diagnosed with brain cancer, he maintained his positive outlook.

"I have had a great life," he said. "I have been married three times, have five children and twelve grandchildren ... I am not going to let it get me down and I am going to keep doing what I love doing."

Folkerts recalled that during a recent visit with Puff, they munched on cookies and sipped iced tea on his patio and he acted like everything was great. But he did not have the strength to walk her to the door.

"I remember that Puff was not a person who would wallow in pity," she said.

George remembers the last time she saw him sitting on his patio. He said to her, "Next spring, I think I'll add some more black-eyed Susans to my garden."

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gwhatchet.com to come

by Lee Rumbarger
Managing Editor

The GW Hatchet will begin publishing online this fall as part of a plan to engage more readers both by expanded coverage and easier accessibility.

Internet readers can check out the new edition immediately after printed copies hit the newsstands.

World Wide Web surfers will be able to scan through The Hatchet's archives – a feature Hatchet editors eagerly anticipate to replace exhuming back issues from the morgue.

"It's exciting to know students on other campuses will be able to read our paper," said Heather Hare, arts editor.

Not just students, but prospective employers and advertisers will be able to acquaint themselves with The Hatchet, points out Editor in Chief Tyson Trish.

"It's a good tool because our writers can tell possible employers to read their work on the Web," he said.

Trish envisions the site growing increasingly interactive, with students answering informal poll questions and submitting letters to the editor all via the Internet.

Featuring GW buff and blue accents and what Trish describes as the new, "pleasing to the eye" look of the paper, the Internet address offers a taste of design changes The Hatchet is implementing in the printed edition.

A "simple," streamlined design will be open to more white space – and to innovative layouts, Trish said. Prior to being elected editor in chief, Trish was The Hatchet's visuals editor.

"Not being as steeped in a news background gives him a cleaner perspective, new ideas and the freedom to question more," said Megan Stack, features editor.

An appealing design will be coupled with a concerted effort to beef up in-depth and features coverage.

The Hatchet will implement monthly planning meetings to bring together writers, photographers, the managing editor and editor in chief.

"There are so many things on this campus we've never explored, and sometimes we rely too much on formula news stories. Now we'll have more of a chance to develop news features and to give writers a chance to work on something they can really be proud of," said Becky Neilson, news editor.

Special projects will be hammered out for each month from the editorial board's story ideas, and the angles and visuals fleshed out at the monthly meetings.

"The meetings will get us coordinated – from the most senior editors to the first-time writers. We can all get involved in making sure the stories people really like to read aren't getting lost in the shuffle," Trish said.

Organization will be key, Trish says, and to that end, the editors will begin the year with a two-day retreat to West Virginia – to enjoy the outdoors and each other's company – and finish plans for the upcoming school year.

The Hatchet's Internet address will be <http://www.gwhatchet.com>



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An Independent Student Newspaper

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SMPA looks ahead, celebrates its past

by Megan Stack
Hatchet Staff Writer

GW's School of Media and Public Affairs is forging ahead in the wake of the June death of associate journalism professor and SMPA father figure Charles Puffenbarger.

"The administration has been very supportive," SMPA Director Jean Folkerts said. "Instead of having to patch programs together to fill the space Puff left, they made it possible to hire a full-time professor of very recent professional experience."

A.L. May will visit the department in a year-long full-time position beginning this fall. May is stepping into the classroom from a 23-year newspaper career, and worked most recently as government and public affairs editor for The Atlanta Journal-

Constitution, Folkerts said.

"A.L. May is wonderful," Folkerts said. "Puff really stood for a connection to working journalism, and I looked for somebody who could reflect that. I'm very happy, because I know that A.L. May does hold many of those values."

May's arrival is part of a larger reshuffling of the department's professors.

Steve Roberts, columnist for The New York Daily News and former senior writer at U.S. News & World Report, will join the staff as the first J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Chair of Media and Public Affairs. Roberts has taught political communication as an adjunct professor since 1992.

Roberts will teach two courses in the fall.

The newly-christened electronic media program, formerly the radio

and television program, will benefit from the professional experience of National Public Radio's John O'Leary, who will join the SMPA faculty for a year-long stint.

Murray Seeger, special adviser to the curator of the Nieman Foundation for the Advancement of Journalism at Harvard University, also will be on hand as adjunct professor.

Former CBS Chief Diplomatic Correspondent Marvin Kalb will be on campus this year as GW Distinguished Visiting Scholar. He will moderate "The Kalb Report: Ethics in Journalism," a series of broadcast panel discussions.

"Not only will it be an enriching opportunity for students, but it should provide insights as to where journalism is today," said GW Director of Public Affairs Mike

Freedman. Freedman serves as executive producer of the Kalb Report at GW.

"It should prove useful to working journalists and news executives. There is a need for this; the profession is at such a crossroads," Freedman added.

"When it is broadcast it will be, 'Brought to you by GW and the School of Media and Public Affairs,'" said Suzanne Clark, SMPA's coordinator of external relations.

SMPA is anticipating a move out of its offices in the Academic Center and into its own building. The University hopes to break ground this fall in the parking lot behind the shops and offices at 2000 Pennsylvania Ave.

"We're projecting two years before we move," Folkerts said. "But it will be great, because it will put all

of the programs – electronic media, journalism and political communication in the same place."

The building also will house the graduate political management and public policy programs.

In the midst of developmental flurry, SMPA will pause in October to pay tribute to Puffenbarger with an evening of remembrance at the National Press Club.

"It will be a lot of people who knew him at various stages in his career," Folkerts said. "That will be a big weekend for GW journalism."

Speakers will include family members as well as former students and colleagues.

"We've been in close touch with his daughters on the phone to organize the tribute," Clark said. "So the plans have really been moving quickly."

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Remembering Puff

In the spring of 1993 I visited George Washington in the midst of a heat wave and the Gay and Lesbian March on Washington.

Coming from my small, mountain home of Durango, Colorado, I was, needless to say, a bit overwhelmed and disoriented. I staggered into the journalism department sweating under the load of my pack. I had no appointment or specific contacts, but a gentleman who insisted I call him, simply, "Puff," took the time to sit down with me and chat away the sweltering afternoon.

When I emerged, I knew I had a friend and a mentor who just happened to be an important figure in the high-powered world of journalism in Washington, D.C.

I was fortunate enough to be taken under his wing during my four years at GW, and I feel sorry for future students who will not get to hear Puff's sage advice and hilarious stories of his long and exciting life.

I'm having difficulty reconciling myself with the fact that I will not become part of the extensive "Puff Network" of alumni who have kept in touch with Puff and with each other through Puff for years.

I guess my favorite memory of Puff is that he was more concerned with his students and their future than anything. He was interested in students' lives – even if they weren't going to be the next Woodward or Bernstein.

—Kynan Kelly, managing editor
The GW Hatchet, 1995-1997

What I'll miss most is sitting in Puff's GW office talking with him about the news of the day. Inevitably, he'd throw into the conversation an apt anecdote, often hilarious, from his newspaper days. Only after his death did it come to me that these chats in his office are at the heart of his legacy.

Students, past and present professional journalists and academics who visited Puff's office were guests in a living journalism museum. All around were exhibits of the last 40 years of the profession: front pages, pithy quotations, famous and infamous headlines, bloopers and other gee-gaws. Many gee-gaws. You knew it was a serious endeavor when a T-shirt bearing the image of a particularly noteworthy front page had permanent occupancy of one of two guest chairs.

Folks who were lucky enough to hang out with Puff in his office – me and the old timers from The Washington Star and students just beginning their journalism education – would seem to have only the smallest thread in common. We're from different generations and we came to journalism when the craft represented starkly different things. But we were all connected in Puff's world view. We were part of a continuum. He was the facilitator and his office was common ground.

This was a blast for him. What he didn't say in so many words was that it was good for us too. I hope students learned a few things from me during my talks to Puff's classes. I know I learned from them. Their well-crafted questions forced me to stop and think about what I do and why.

All of this raises the obvious, troubling question: is there anyone who can fill Puff's shoes and – with wisdom and good humor – tend to our journalism family tree? Not that I can see.

—Susan Feeney, reporter
The Dallas Morning News

Charles W. Puffenbarger, known to all as "Puff," was our colleague, our adviser, and our friend. One person, speaking at the funeral service, noted that we will all remember Puff with great affection. A student remembered that Puff said it was alright when she decided she didn't want to be a journalist. A journalism alumnus came by the other day and recalled that he was kind of worried when he went to tell Puff that he was going to leave journalism and go to law school. He said, "But that was O.K. with him, and I should have known ahead of time that it would be okay." Puff had the unusual ability to disagree with a faculty colleague on a "hot" issue and not make it personal. That is why we all remember Puff with great affection.

We all miss him. Every now and then I look up from my desk at my office door and expect him to be standing there, ready to tell me a story – a joke – to laugh about a bizarre headline or to relate an e-mail message from a recent alum. The sadness comes when I realize he is not there. One alumna told me last week that she felt sorry for the current students who'd had Puff with them for only a few years. "He's been at my side for 17 years," she said. He was there, ready to help her with her career, answer her questions, calm her down, tell her things would be okay.

Puff was the only faculty member who knew which student had broken up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, had just argued with their parents, felt like the one-person-out group at The Hatchet, or had been rejected for two jobs in a row. Students told him their troubles and came to celebrate their successes. He could commiserate and encourage or he could congratulate and cheer.

Yesterday Maria George, executive aide at the School, Suzanne Clarke, the coordinator for external affairs, and I were cleaning his office and we came across some old pictures of Puff in the Navy. We were laughing at his youthful grin and Maria commented that Puff must be watching us and laughing too. So we will not lose him. He will be with countless students, faculty and family members, laughing with us, cheering us on, and commiserating with us in our troubles. Because once you're a friend of Puff's, you're his friend always.

—Jean Folkerts, director
School of Media and Public Affairs

Responding to a request for a short memoir of Puff a few days after his death and six months into a dreadful year for him, his family and friends is tough duty.

So rather than trying to come up with a single incident that could sum up the 50-year career of Charles W. Puffenbarger, let me tell about him and his students.

No one since he was known as Bill in his youthful days in Cumberland, Md., has called him Bill, and few knew him as Charlie.

Everyone including the dozens of students and former students who rallied around him since his wife Susan died tragically in January knew him as Puff and called him that. The obit writer at the Post who wrote straight and well about his death had known him for 28 years and did not know that "Puff" actually had other given names. Is it good for an authoritarian figure like a college professor to have that kind of easy relationship with students? For his students and for Puff himself, regardless of the norm, this was wonderful and is largely what distinguished him and endeared him to colleagues and students alike.

Puff worked up until near the end, alternating his classes with radiation and chemotherapy, finishing his Spring semester duties and then a few weeks after getting his grades in, rapidly grew weaker and succumbed. Student after student, many among those who took him to breakfast almost every Sunday since his travail began months ago, spoke

Puff would go on hold with our conversation while he beckoned the youngster in and dealt with the question or the problem.

Not that he dealt condescendingly or too softly, as one might suspect of a professor known to students openly by his nickname. He was demanding, and expecting the best of his students, very often got it.

He was about as proud as a parent when a student did exceptional work, got an internship, won an honor, went on to make a great place for him/herself in the journalistic world. Many did.

Puff was always self-effacing, speaking of his colleagues' accomplishments on the newspaper or his students' progress and success as if this was being done without Puff's gifted and highly professional assistance.

But in his last months in banquets at the National Press Club, he did begin to get some of the recognition long overdue. The Hatchet, where he was an original member of the board of directors, named him a winner of the lifetime alumni achievement award (he held an M.A. in history from GW.) The Washington Society of Professional Journalists some weeks later honored him with its Distinguished Service Award.

Among brief true stories told at that time: when Carl Bernstein whom Puff had mentored at the old Star applied at The Post, Puff told the editors, "Hire him. He will win you a Pulitzer Prize someday." When Puff himself later went to The Post, the curmudgeon for whom he first worked pulled him aside one day, in The Post's fabled period of creative tension, and suggested he switch to another desk. "You'll never make it on this desk. You are too nice a guy!" And when a student one day went to Prof. Bob Willson then heading the Journalism Department to request a switch in classes – "I just don't get along with Prof. Puffenbarger" – Bob suggested that anyone

who could not get along with Puff should probably switch not just classes but schools.

When Puff was nominated for the SPJ award, some two dozen colleagues and former students wrote supporting letters. One of them nailed it: "He was the Mr. Chips of journalism education."

Lord, how he will be missed.

—Phil Robbins, journalist
Former GW professor

The GW community suffered a great loss last week with the passing of Charles "Puff" Puffenbarger, who to many people was a best friend and colleague in journalism and beyond.

For a man who had suffered so many hardships during the past year, one can only hope now that he is resting comfortably, reunited with his wife in a good place. But his presence there robs us of one of journalism's – and The GW Hatchet's – greatest allies and confidantes.

Future journalism students will never get to hear Puff's entertaining

and insightful stories of a life in journalism. They won't get to hear what an instrumental role he indirectly had in The Washington Post's Watergate scandal coverage, for example (when he was an editor there, Puff hired Carl Bernstein as a copy aide). Nor will they have him there to remind them daily of all the internships and scholarships they should be applying for.

Most importantly, though, they won't find him in his office with the door open, ready to counsel and advise any student who needs direction.

That is a shame, but for the thousands of students who did have the privilege of interacting with him over the years, those memories will stay with us forever. It was no surprise that at the memorial service shortly after he died, the room was bursting at the seams with Puff's friends – both former colleagues in the newspaper business and current ones from the faculty, as well as swarms of current and former students. The crowd intermingled, each group of people marveling at all of the other groups, realizing not for the first time how fully Puff influenced so many different people.

Puffenbarger will forever be remembered as the man who embodied the ideal mix of teacher and practitioner. His journalism career spanned the decades, and when he came to GW to teach, there was no doubt about his professional credentials. But what made Puff so amazing was how well he made the transition to the classroom. He clearly knew his industry, and he clearly knew how to teach it to others as well.

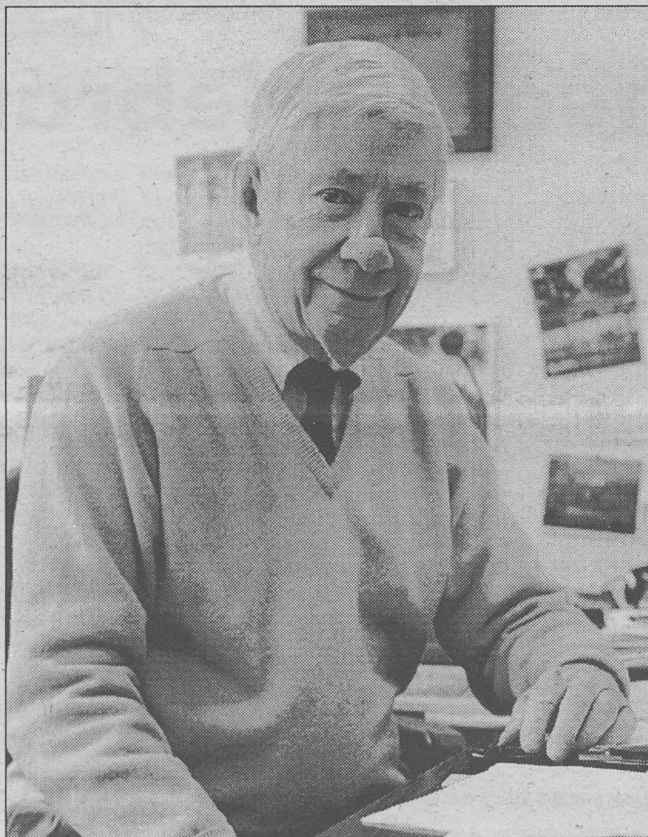
Puff's teaching had a special impact on The Hatchet, to which he was without a doubt a father-figure for so many. He embraced this newspaper and tried whenever possible to make it better through both his teaching in the classroom and his service on The Hatchet's Board of Directors. Puff was a board member from the first day The Hatchet became an independent student newspaper, and his commitment and dedication earned him the paper's Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award in May.

Everyone who has served as an editor with The Hatchet since Puff arrived at GW can call themselves better from the experience of having Puff both in the classroom and at the paper. His contributions to The Hatchet will be impossible to fully replace.

Also, Puff was a tireless defender of his profession – claiming whenever someone would challenge him that journalism is a good industry, filled with good, dedicated people. He was a man of unquestionable character, and his ethics distinguish him. That is what he tried to impart on others, whether it was young journalists he nurtured as an editor or young students he coddled as a mentor. He knew that if he continued to tell it like it is, young journalists would carry on the tradition and the values he espoused. Even as the industry changed around him, Puff adapted and learned, whether in new technologies or new styles.

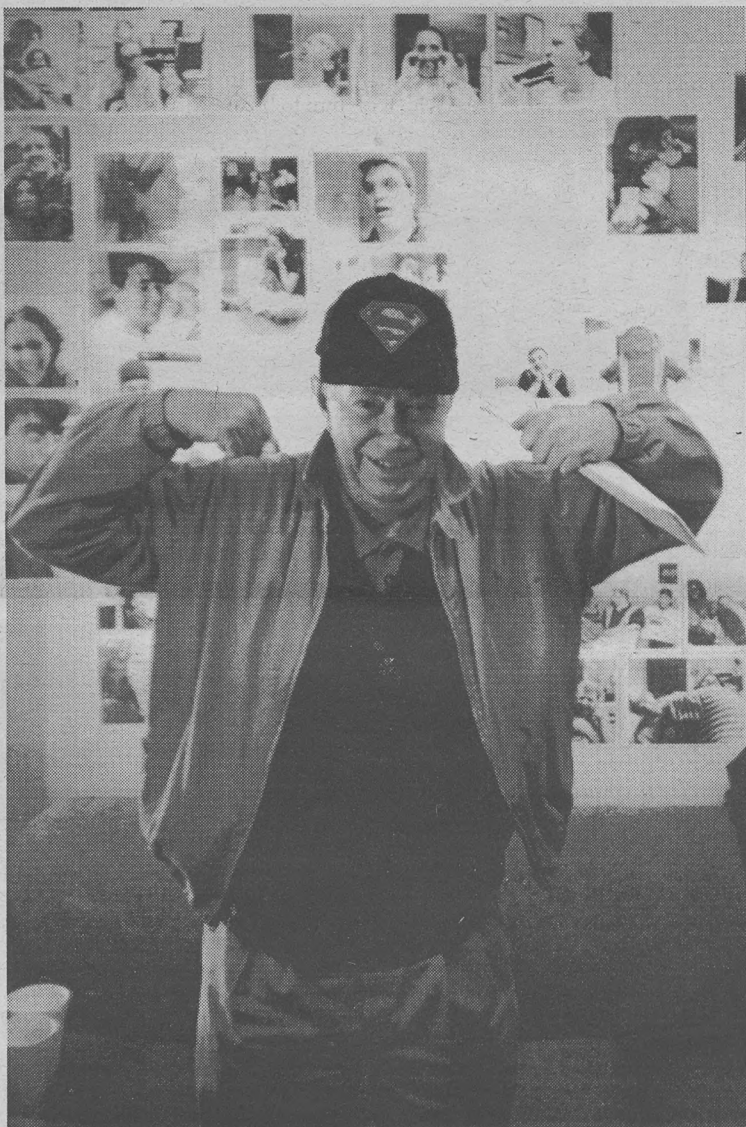
But he never abandoned the basics of what made him successful. And in passing that on, he ensured that an ever-widening web of his protégés will continue passing that tradition on to those they interact with. That will be his legacy, and that is why he will be so sorely missed.

—Jared Sher, editor in chief
The GW Hatchet 1995-1997



Hatchet file photo
Journalism professor Charles W. Puffenbarger always left his door open to students. Puff died of cancer on June 28.

Charles W. Puffenbarger



Journalist, Teacher, Friend
We will miss you, Puff.

GW Hatchet Scholarship Dinner

by **Becky Neilson**

News Editor

The GW Hatchet's scholarship drive raised about \$34,520 during the first six months of the campaign, Hatchet General Manager Steve Morse said.

Half of this amount is a dollar-for-dollar donation from the University, matching the funds The Hatchet raises from alumni and friends. GW President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg has pledged to continue to mirror donations up to \$250,000.

Current and former Hatchet staff, GW faculty and members of the Washington journalism community officially kicked off the campaign May 3 with a dinner at the National Press Club in Washington.

Morse said 129 donors had contributed \$17,260 to the scholarship fund as of June 30.

The four-year campaign goal is \$500,000 to help fund scholarships for The Hatchet's student editorial board and business staff.

Washington Post Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr. was the keynote speaker at the May dinner, which aired on C-SPAN2 late this summer.

Mark Olshaker ('72), a former Hatchet arts editor and award-winning filmmaker and novelist, hosted the dinner.

Three Hatchet alumni – Joye Brown, B.D. Colen and Charles Puffenbarger – were honored at the event with alumni achievement awards for their accomplishments in journalism.

Colen, a 1973 GW graduate and former executive news editor of The Hatchet, led the team of Newsday reporters who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1981 for its coverage of the story of Baby Jane Doe. In addition to his work as a medical writer for Newsday, he was the founding editor of the paper's science section and a Metro and medical reporter for The Washington Post.

Former Hatchet Editor in Chief Brown ('77) was also a member of the Pulitzer-winning Newsday team and is currently manager of editorial staff development at the paper. She has been Newsday's Nassau County editor, assistant city editor and a minority affairs reporter.

Brown won the 1994 Deadline Club award for her management of Newsday's coverage of the Long Island Railroad shooting.

Though he never worked at The Hatchet, Puffenbarger was an associate professor in GW's journalism department until he passed away in June. He earned his master's degree in American history from GW in 1964, and was an adviser and board member at The Hatchet since it incorporated in 1993.

Also at the dinner, former Editor in Chief Jared Sher presented the Charles Puffenbarger Student Service Award to former Managing Editor Kynan Kelly.

Sher said the award will be presented annually to a member of The Hatchet staff who has given exceptional service to the newspaper.

Kelly, a 1997 journalism graduate, was managing editor of The Hatchet for two years, after service as sports editor.



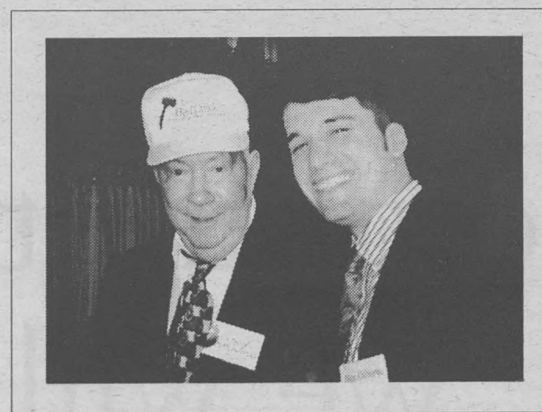
The 1996-1997 editorial board celebrates the end of another successful semester.



Former editors (l. to r.) Elissa Leibowitz, Sarah Western, John Rega and David Larimer are among dozens of former and current staff members who attended The Hatchet's fundraising dinner.



Puff, former Editor in Chief Jared Sher and Washington Post Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr. enjoy a chicken dinner during the scholarship gala.



Puff and former sports editor Ben Osborne are all smiles during the Press Club event.

Sports

7 The GW Hatchet, Monday, August 18, 1997

GW's hoop dreams

It has happened several times already this summer. The minute I tell someone I'm the sports editor at GW's student newspaper, they immediately ask how good the men's basketball team will be this season.

men's basketball

It seems GW sports are known mainly for the men's basketball program. Well, this got me thinking about basketball a little early – and it seems the Colonials have all the pieces in place for a memorable season.

Sports is cyclical in nature. Winning teams come in cycles. It's an easy pattern to identify. A team will be basement dwellers for awhile, slowly building a winning team.

Then the team's stars will depart for whatever reason and the club will start losing. The cycle begins again.

Why should GW sports fans be interested in this pattern? It appears this could be the season the GW men's basketball team reaches the peak of the winning cycle. In other words, this could be a special year for the Colonials.

Because players only have four years of eligibility, the cycle moves fast for college teams. It could be years before the Colonials get another chance to go deep into the NCAA Tournament, a chance they have this season.

For a team to be truly successful, all the pieces of the puzzle must be present. This year, GW seems to have everything in place. A star center (Alexander Koul), a spark plug point guard (Shawnta Rogers), a versatile scoring forward (Yegor Mescheriakov), a tough one-on-one defender (Andrei Krivonos) and role players who can come off the bench and provide a spark when the team isn't scoring (J.J. Brade, Darin Green and Seco Camara).

However, all these pieces were in place last season and GW failed to meet expectations with a disappointing 15-14 record. So what will be different in 1997? The Colonials will have two key components which they didn't have last season. One is experience. The other is Patrick Ngongba.

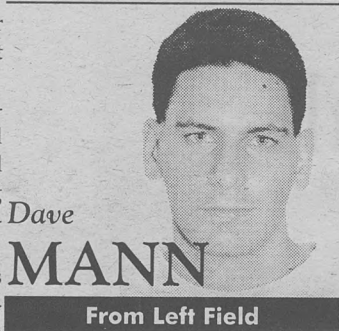
Last season, GW lost close game after close game with only one senior on the roster. Clearly, the Colonials suffered from a lack of experience. Last season could turn out to be one big learning experience for the team. If they learned the poise to make shots in the final ten minutes of close games, then their record should be much improved.

Ngongba was a highly touted recruit going into last season, but was declared ineligible to play for academic reasons. Ngongba is 6-7 and 220 pounds. He could provide another inside presence along with Alexander Koul. Mix in Mescheriakov at the other forward spot, and GW could have one of the best front lines in the country.

Head coach Mike Jarvis said at the end of last year that, had Ngongba been allowed to play, the Colonials would have won five more games.

This front line, combined with Rogers in the backcourt and some improved outside shooting from the other guards, could make GW one of the top 15 teams in the country.

—Dave Mann



Dave

MANN

From Left Field

Upcoming Games

Monday

no games scheduled

Tuesday

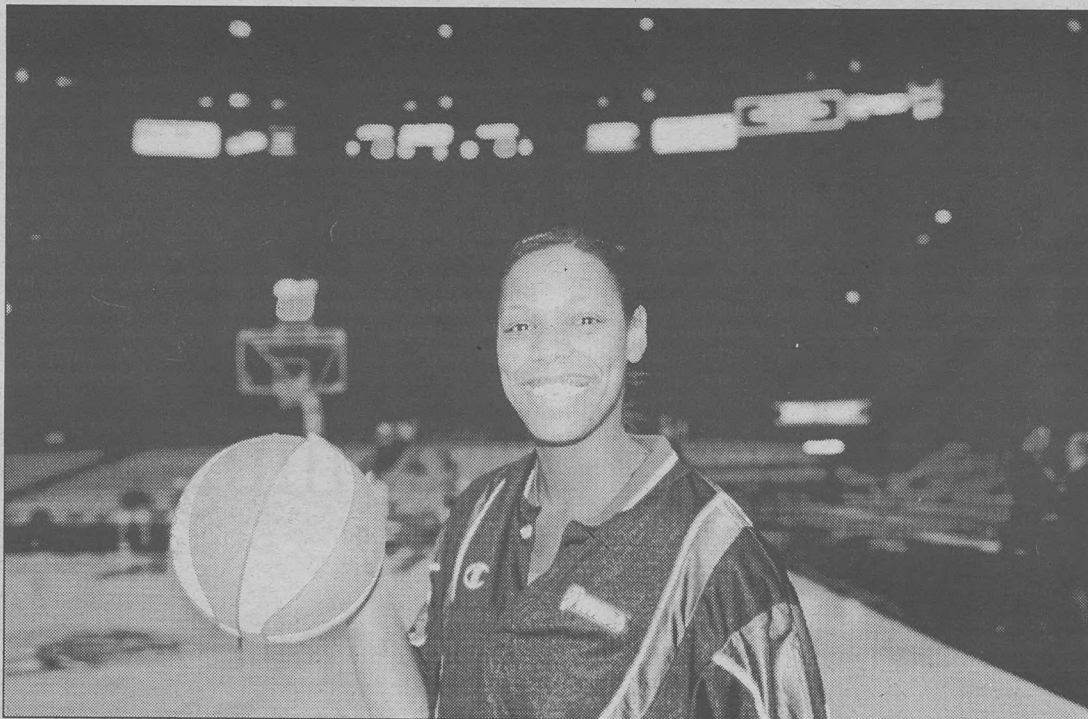
no games scheduled

Wednesday

no games scheduled

Thursday

no games scheduled



TJ IS ALL SMILES

The former GW All-American has played in every game during her first professional season.

photos by Tyson Trish/editor in chief

WNBA is new challenge to former GW star Abraham

By Dave Mann

Sports Editor

Six months ago Tajama Abraham was an All-American center leading the GW women's basketball team to new heights. Only a half a year later she is a role player for the Women's NBA's Sacramento Monarchs.

The transition has not been easy. Abraham has had difficulty adjusting to the increased skill level and physical play in the WNBA.

"It's been hard. The physical level of the game is just 10 times greater than any type of competition I've been in during college or all-star games," Abraham said. "But you have to remember, I'm playing with players who have been playing for nine or 10 years, where as this is my first step out into the real world."

Although Abraham has played in every game this season for Sacramento, she mostly comes off the bench. Abraham started only five games, averaging 15 minutes of playing time. Through the first 25 games of the WNBA season, Abraham was averaging 4.3 points and 2 rebounds per game. She has 11 blocks on the season and is shooting 63 percent from the field.

"I've been improving every game," Abraham said. "I've been told I'm going to be a player to be reckoned with in the next few years. People say the moves are there, I just have to get stronger."

Playing alongside one of the league's leading scorers in Ruthie Bolton-Holifield, Abraham's offense has not had the chance to flourish. She is no longer the first option offensively, as she was in college. When she is given the ball, Abraham has had a harder time scoring against bigger and stronger defenders.

But as Abraham's offensive talents have largely not been called upon, her defense has become a main staple of her game.

"My role has changed from college," Abraham said. "In college I wasn't known for my defense ... here, the coach looks to me to help contain players, so my offensive abilities have not been recognized."

Like many rookies, Abraham has shown flashes of future success. She scored a career high 13 points in a game July 21 and has slowly been adjusting to the increased levels of skill and physical play which have come with playing against some of the best women's basketball players in the world. Abraham sees a long career for herself in a league that has been more popular than expected in its first season.

"We've drawn bigger crowds than were anticipated by the offices of the WNBA," Abraham said. "We draw

a different audience than the men's game. Because of that I think there are a lot of people there to support us."

Although she sees a bright future for the WNBA, Abraham admits that play in the league this season has been sloppy.

"It has been a little sloppy because this is the first year and you're throwing together players from different countries with different work ethics and different mentalities," Abraham said. "Next year it'll be much better and they'll build on that."

Abraham says many players would like to see the WNBA's short 27 game season extended because the off-season is too long. In the eight months she will not be playing for Sacramento, Abraham says she would like to return to the Washington area, and may accept an assistant coaching position at George Mason University.

"I like the Washington area, and besides, I have to see Khadija (Deas), Mandisa (Turner), Chasity (Myers) and big Dee (Brown) play."



Tajama Abraham has had trouble scoring against the WNBA's more physical defenders such as New York's Rebecca Lobo.

Hatchet file photo

Versatile forward Yegor Mescheriakov will be key to the Colonial's 1997 success.



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